



John D. Harvey, *Interpreting the Pauline Letters* (Kregel Academic: Grand Rapids), 2012.

Harvey's handbook strives to give readers a series of 'keys' to interpret the Letters of Paul (by which he means everything in the New Testament attributed to Paul except Hebrews). He herein discusses the genre of the letters, their historical background(s), and theology. He next moves to provide hermeneutical guidance for 'preparing to interpret', 'interpreting', and 'communicating' the message of the letters. In the final substantive chapter he provides a couple of examples of moving from text to sermon. A bibliography concludes the work along with a glossary of terms.

Each chapter is prefaced with a 'chapter at a glance' text-box and concludes with a 'summary of the chapter' text-box. These are helpful enough, as are the various tables and charts which festoon the book. The use of bold-face type cues the reader to terms found in the glossary and this too is a useful feature.

Harvey does a good job describing the genre(s) of Paul's letters but his assertion that

External and internal evidence support the authenticity and integrity of the thirteen canonical Pauline letters (p. 45)

is simply untrue. Harvey is free, of course, to believe that the 13 letters attributed to Paul actually came from Paul but he is not free to assert that external and internal evidence support this perspective. Greater minds have found otherwise. And though he tries mightily to prove his case, his evidence is loaded down with special pleading. Consequently, his belief that the authenticity and integrity and, additionally now, the historical setting (!)

... for each of Paul's letters [is] established... (p. 77)

does not hold up.

Better by far is his discussion of Paul's theology which, I'm happy to say, he manages quite nicely. Equally good is his treatment of textual criticism (but it's fair to say that conservative scholars are generally quite good at this aspect of 'lower criticism'. It's higher criticism which trips them up).

Nonetheless, amidst his discussion of translating texts, his suggestion that interlinear's are useful (though in a limited way) is exceedingly distressing. If one reads Greek (or Hebrew) an interlinear isn't necessary; and if one doesn't, an interlinear is normally only used by pretenders who wish to present themselves as scholars when they – in reality – lack the requisite skills to work with the languages directly. When Harvey opines

The advantage of working from an interlinear is its time efficiency in that it relates the translation to the Greek without engaging in the process of developing a full translation (p. 109)

my soul screams NEIN! If interpreters aren't going to 'engage in the process of developing a full translation' they should leave the text alone and simply dabble with English versions and not pretend to do otherwise.

Another bit of disconcerting stuff in Harvey's volume is his failure to recommend the most important bibliographical materials. So, for instance, while discussing textual and translational work he recommends Dan Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* and Blass, Debrunner, and Funk's *Grammar*. But where is the astonishingly important *Grammar* of Moulton, Howard, and Turner? And further along, when he discusses Paul's theology, he lists Ladd and Marshall and Zuck but not Bultmann. How is that possible? How does it even make sense? And at the end of the volume where he lists Systematic Theology resources he ignores Barth and Brunner completely and instead has Erickson and Grudem and someone named R.L. Reymond!

His listing of recommended commentaries is also tragically inadequate, as it contains only the most conservative volumes and ignores the most important, regardless of theological viewpoint or critical stance.

There is, consequently, much to dislike about this volume. There is also, nevertheless, much to like. The chapter on the theology of Paul is very good and the chapter offering guidance from text to sermon is very, very helpful (particularly for beginners- though some veterans too would do well to review it).

I can recommend this book to potential readers, albeit with some hesitation. Such persons should be aware beforehand that the viewpoint of the author is skewed to a conservative reading of Paul and the resources recommended follow the same pattern.

Jim West  
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